



January 2008

# PEPster Power

A newsletter for & by  
PEP facilitators

## From the Editor:

Wow! I'm so impressed with the accomplishments of everyone who e-mailed me with updates of what you have been doing. It's just amazing – the diversity of approaches and projects and the results.

Perhaps next time, you'll send me photos, and we can add them to the website. I'll find out if written releases are necessary.

Since it's still January, I'll wish you a happy, healthy and fun New Year!

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### HOLD THE DATE(S):

A PEP facilitators' conference is on the calendar for **March 27 (snow date March 28<sup>th</sup>), 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.** at the Middlesex County Extension Center.. The topic is “**Sustainable Living**”, an introduction to how the small things of everyday living can make a difference for our families, our communities, our country and our planet.

Also, add to your calendar, and share with interested colleagues: **PEP Facilitators' Training Thursday and Friday, April 3 & 4** from 9:00 to 4:00 pm at the Middlesex County Extension Center.

UConn Extension Center, Middlesex County  
1066 Saybrook Road (Route 154)  
Haddam, Connecticut

**BLOOMFIELD:** **Melinda Gates**, says that she works “in partnership with Gail Nolan, Bloomfield School Readiness/Discovery Coordinator”. During 2007, they worked with their PEP group to develop a Resource Guide for Parents in Bloomfield called ‘The Kids Connection’, which was distributed all over town to parents. One of the PEP Moms created the design for the Guide, and it’s now being used on T-shirts, with the saying, “Bloomfield Kids are #1”. Melinda says that this is “to promote a positive spirit re: kids on Bloomfield, especially in light of the fact that we've been spotlighted in recent Hartford Courant articles for poor test grades despite great efforts to improve in town.”

**Karla Woodworth** in **TORRINGTON** is excited because they just received their grant to run the PEP program and will be “rolling” in late January or early February.

**WEST HARTFORD** will be offering PEP again this year starting on Jan. 28<sup>th</sup> according to **Robin Drago!** Recruitment has started (date TBA). Colleague **Jackie Salinas** completed PEP training, and will offer a PEP group in Spanish, and Robin will offer one group in English. Robin also facilitated one group in Wallingford, working with **Roberta Colette**.

**Kim Townsend**, a Parent Educator at the Terry Smith Family Resource Center (FRC) in **WINDSOR**, has just completed a PEP group. Although the group is very small, and Kim doesn't have a grant, her creative PEPsters have decided to put together little baggies of hot cocoa with marshmallows and sprinkles to sell in town at other FRCs! The profits will go toward "The Diaper Closet" in town located at Social Services. Our guest speaker for session 5 was the town social worker and she stated this was the greatest need since most food banks are well supplied during the holidays.

Reporting in from **TORRINGTON, Marcy Fenn** notes that TECC (Torrington Early Childhood Collaborative) sponsored her training. She conducted the 10-week course with 1-2 meetings a month throughout the summer to work on the community project. According to Marcy, the Parent Trust Fund which Torrington used to run its PEP program did not know the extent of the program. It funded only the basic class, not knowing that people were supposed to do a community project, have a celebration, and meet further throughout the year (which meant on-going meetings and childcare). It is her understanding that the Torrington Early Education Collaborative (TECC) offers PEP classes to parents and then their future involvement is through the collaborative. Also, if any additional TECC funds were to be used, the project had to link to early childhood (birth - age 8).

The Spring 2007 Torrington PEP class chose Parks and Playgrounds for a community project. This included:

1. Video taped and photographed existing conditions of the parks, mapped out locations, and created a list of 'what makes a good park.'
2. Presented findings to Park and Rec director (made huge storyboards with pictures).
3. Researched concept of indoor space and boundless playground to be centrally located.

The group found out that Torrington had two playscapes that had not been put in. They realized that there was no purpose of applying for a grant to receive a boundless playscape/playground when there is not a system in place to for general upkeep and prevention of vandalism. Many parents in the PEP class were also involved in TECC, attending 1-4 meetings a month, once our goals were achieved (i.e. gather information, present, and research), they did not continue

to meet once a month with Park and Rec to follow through on the safety of our parks, a possible 'friends of the park' neighborhood watch program, and the putting up of the new playground equipment (although we were asked to pick the new equipment out). The parent committee of TECC is now considering have this be one of their agenda items for the year.

There will be another PEP class offered in the spring and another type of PEP class in Spanish around the same time. The TECC parent committee is working on a way to begin playgroups that will introduce parents to the PEP class and eventually a TECC committee (ongoing community involvement). Two different people will be teaching these spring classes.

The PEP class has propelled some parents to become more active in their communities in other ways - doing things they never thought they could have done. The group's heart really went out to the youth in the community. Since they couldn't pursue this (since it is outside the bracket of ages birth to 8) and weren't able to find resources outside of TECC, they didn't remain as interested and involved throughout the year. Part of this is because we are not continuing to meet monthly and because they have since become more actively involved in TECC (just not the playground initiative specifically).

**Rob White**, instructor at Central Connecticut State University in **NEW BRITAIN**, has had lots of projects during the year. Highlights include: helping to obtain a grant for an Afro-American church to create a play for presentation to the community. Children in the church are the performers and the minister is the primary grant recipient from Middletown. The group is meeting at the

Buttonwood Tree and part of the grant is used to pay a teacher, who comes in from Hartford, to direct the work. Rob's also a member of the Middlesex (County) Coalition to develop programs for Middlesex youth, where he has a workshop (part of a larger group meeting) on the use of story-boards to conceptualize and actualize concepts. He's creating a photo display of kids and their activities at alternative education schools, which will be exhibited at the New Britain Public Library during May, to help the community learn about the schools. With others who are interested in alternative education, Rob held Saturday morning workshops in Robotics for kids. The results of their creative work is in the window of Laser Tag in Middletown,

**Christina Gonzales**, in **CONNECTICUT** facilitated a Youth PEP group with the youth that attended her after-school program. She reports that they really enjoyed many of the topics the PEP curriculum covered. They had a blast building close relationships. And Christina notes that what "I got from PEP is when you focus on learning and understanding one another, it is easier to communicate and go about things. This is definitely a good tool in helping build community."

**Laverne Campbell** of **WATERBURY** and **Ruthann Horvay** of the **WINSTED** Family Resource Center said things are quiet right now. Out in **DANBURY**, according to **Elizabeth Cotter**, The Danbury community has yet to support any PEP activities in English. All PEP classes have been presented in Spanish and Portuguese.

Along the shore, **Marlane Clark** reports that a successful early December holiday gathering for the **GROTON PILOTS** families featured a potluck dinner that was

followed by a children's craft hour, a grab bag for the moms and gifts for the children. Upon leaving the party the Moms received a Christmas CD, Christmas card and a 2008 planner. One of the clients wanted to give back to the PILOTS Program so she held a clothes drive and collected approximately 30 bags of clothes and toys that were given out to other clients at the party.

**Carol Corliss** of **BRISTOL** at the O'Connell School FRC has doing PEP for the past six years or so, and says this year that it's be taking a while to get a group going. However, she's excited to report that she recently conducted a workshop called "Traditions and Visions: A Breakfast Discussion." I used one of the "extra" PEP sessions called "Family Rituals." Eight moms, one dad, and one grandmother attended the workshop while the children enjoyed a playgroup. Participants provided lots of positive feedback on the session.

**Deborah Zipkin**, Director at the The Family Resource Center at Charter Oak Academy in **WEST HARTFORD** is currently doing PEP in English during January and planning to do PEP in Spanish in Marr.

**Stephanie Young**, Compassion Ministries, Inc. took facilitator training for the PEP program in November. She has with DCF's Bureau of Adolescent and Transitional Services, who is are very interested in the programs of Compassion Ministries, which includes the PEP Youth program. She will be meeting with them again soon to see in exactly which of their services PEP would provide a great benefit.

